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SUBJECT: NEPAL: GOVERNMENT ACTION PLAN ON WOMEN POSITIVE,
BUT NOT ACHIEVABLE

¶1. Summary. On March 8, the Government of Nepal unveiled its National Plan on Women designed to bring Nepal into compliance with the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The plan mandates the government to amend discriminatory laws and regulations, increase women's participation in elections, civil service and other public activities, and promote women's health and education. However, an official at the government ministry responsible for the plan is concerned that the ministry lacks the resources to implement the plan successfully. Likewise, civil society is skeptical of the government's ability to achieve true social reform. End Summary.

¶2. On March 8, International Women's Day, the Government of Nepal (GON) released a National Plan on Women outlining actions the government will take over the next 3 years to promote the status of women in government service, public activities, health and education. The plan is designed to bring Nepal into compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and identifies the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare as the lead implementing agency.

¶3. According to the plan, the GON will eliminate all gender-based discriminatory laws and regulations within 3 years. Joint Secretary S.S. Sharma of the Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare (MWCSW) noted that some progress has already been achieved in this area. A comprehensive study was conducted on legal instruments and, as a result, MWCSW has proposed amendments to 40 government regulations and 154 clauses within various national laws that would eliminate gender-based discrimination, he said. Sharma indicated that he was working with the Attorney General's Office on this issue, but progress would necessarily be limited due to the absence of parliament. The national plan also mandates that 33 percent of candidates in national and local elections should be women and 20 percent of civil service positions should be filled with women. Sharma stated that the government already has initiated classes for women to prepare for the civil service examination. The plan also seeks to increase female participation to 33 percent in public activities, such as local development boards and government workshops.

¶4. Sharma also expressed concern about the ability of his ministry to implement the national plan. Sharma indicated that the Ministry would be hard pressed to implement the plan with the limited resources allocated to it by the government. The National Plan on Women, he said, is only one of 7 plans that have been adopted or are in the pipeline for which MWCSW has significant responsibilities. Moreover, he expects the ministry's budget of NRs 190 million (roughly USD 2.5 million, or .2 percent of the national budget) to be reduced even further in the next fiscal year. With only 25 professional staff in Kathmandu and 75 Women Development officers around the country, Sharma did not know how his Ministry would implement the plan successfully.

¶5. Nepali civil society has reacted positively, although with a certain amount of skepticism. Sapana Pradhan-Malla, President of the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), explained that preparations for the National Plan on Women began in 1999 but stalled after the Parliament was dissolved in May 2002. (Note. Pradhan-Malla had been hired by UNDP as a consultant to assist in developing the national plan and, therefore, was closely involved in the process. End Note.) Pradhan-Malla was disappointed and surprised that the GON issued the plan without further consultation. She criticized the government for failing to include comments from the January CEDAW Conference in New York, for which Pradhan-Malla had authored Nepal's Shadow Report. The plan also fails to address critical issues that would affect implementation, such as the absence of a sitting parliament and the ongoing insurgency, she added. Concerned that the plan is not achievable within the time frame Pradhan-Malla opined that the GON should incorporate all related action plans -- the draft Human Rights Plan of Action, Beijing Plan of Action, the Tenth Plan and the National Plan on Trafficking in Persons -- within a single, achievable framework that can be

monitored by civil society.

16. Comment. By promoting and advancing the status of women in Nepal, the GON is attempting to address some of the root causes of the insurgency. Even if the plan is implemented slowly, the principles and ideals it contains provide a positive and constructive vision for the future. End Comment.
MALINOWSKI